



# THE SPIRIT ♀ HOLY +++ WEEK





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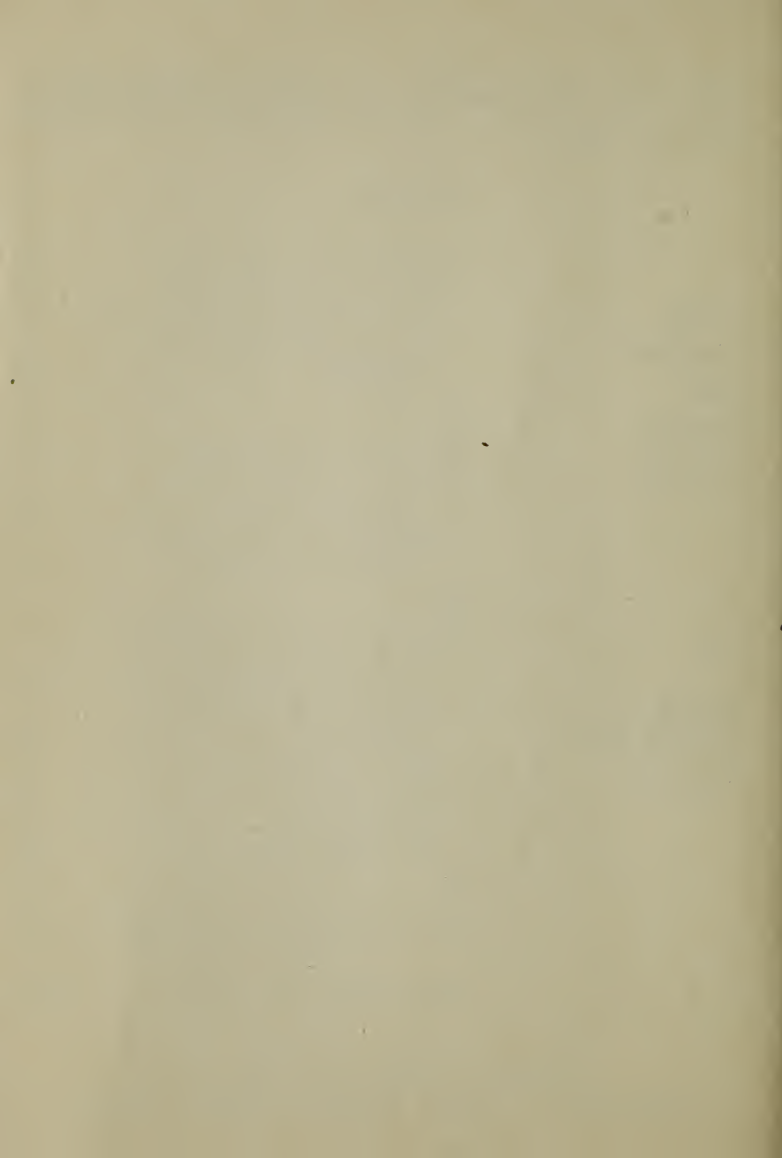
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# THE SPIRIT OF HOLY WEEK

by  
  
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# THE SPIRIT OF HOLY WEEK

## I. REASONS FOR THE RESTORATION

When you consider there is a vast amount of effort involved in making any changes in the rites of the Church, you cannot help wondering why the Holy Father, the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the Bishops all over the world, and our own pastors and their assistants have gone to all the trouble connected with the recent restoration of the rite of Holy Week, the restoration that was put into effect for the first time in 1956. The answer was given in the official Instruction sent out from Rome—the reason for these changes is to enable the *faithful* to assist at the rites of Holy Week *more easily, more devotedly and more fruitfully*.

But the obvious question then is: What is there about these rites that makes the Church so anxious to have us attend them? The Decree announcing the restoration answers “The liturgical rites of Holy Week have not only a special dignity, but a particular sacramental power and efficacy for the nourishment of Christian life, and adequate substitutes for them cannot be found in those devotional exercises commonly called extraliturgical which have been observed in the afternoons of these Three Days.” This sentence tells us that the Decree for the restoration of the Holy Week rites is the latest step in the great program inaugurated at the beginning of this century by St. Pius X to make available once more to the ordinary laity that “active participation in the Sacred Mysteries and the public and solemn prayer of the Church” which is “the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit” (Pius X: *Motu Proprio on Sacred Music*).

The first step in this program was St. Pius X's own decree authorizing early and frequent Communion. It is hard for us now to imagine how startling this decree must have been to established ways of thought and habits of piety. For centuries Communion had been a very rare occurrence in the lives of the ordinary laity—being received not more than three or

four times a year at most. Even religious hardly dared to dream of receiving every day. And children did not make their First Communion until the age of twelve, or older. None of this, of course, was the official teaching of the Church; it was simply long-established custom. St. Pius X was returning to an earlier and far more authentic custom when he authorized frequent and early Communion in which we rejoice today.

To make the Holy Eucharist, the center and nourishment of Christian life, *easily* available to *all* the faithful, Pope Pius XII first authorized various mitigations of the Eucharistic fast, and then issued the new and easy regulations now in force. He also permitted evening Masses—under certain conditions. Again, during the last decades, permission has been given to use some vernacular in the administration of certain Sacraments in order to promote “the understanding and devotion of the people.” This was given to various countries including our own. And the Decree on Holy Week is to make more available and profitable to the faithful the great rites of the central Week of the Church’s year.

### **Why the Liturgical Rites?**

You might well wonder what difference it makes what services we attend, liturgical or extralitururgical, as long as we try to pray during Holy Week and stay close to our Lord. What is this “particular power and efficacy for the nourishment of Christian life” possessed by the liturgical rites and not by any others? The answer is to be found in the fact that these rites do not only *commemorate past events in the life of Christ*; they also accomplish *present effects in our own lives* when we take part in them attentively and devotedly.

As we all know, sin brought suffering and death to mankind. Without Christ, men would have had to endure these evils without finding any meaning in suffering or without looking forward to any vital human living beyond the grave. But the Son of God became man, enduring suffering and death like other men, but making of His suffering and death



a great offering of obedient love to His Father on behalf of sinful mankind. Suffering united to His can now be of value for the salvation of men and, for all who die united to Christ; death itself has become the gateway to eternal life.

Suffering and death are means used by the powers of evil to increase sin among men, to make them less than human and to divide them from one another. But by undergoing suffering and death in obedience to His Father and in love for His Father and for us, Christ makes of them the means to unite us in the family of God; so He refashions us to the image of His perfect glorified manhood and bestows upon us the radiant fullness of His divine life.

This is God's great Design revealed to us in the Church for which all the centuries of the Old Testament were the foreshadowing and preparation, and of which all the centuries of Christian history are the carrying-out. God is restoring all things in Christ. He is making in Christ and through Christ a new creation far more wonderful than the first creation. This new creation will be completed and made visible when Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will extend His victory over death to the bodies as well as the souls of the redeemed, and will inaugurate the wonderful life of the perfect City of God for which all the ages of human history have been the preparation.

The important thing for us here and now, therefore, is to have the current of Christ's life and action flowing through ours. To put it another way, the true purpose of our lives is to enter into the great redeeming Action of Christ, so that everything we do, everything we suffer and, finally, our own death, will partake of the power and effectiveness of His. For, though we were made without our own cooperation, we are not to be saved without it. And besides, in His great courtesy, Christ not only redeems us, He also makes us able to take part in His work of redemption—not only to help ourselves, but to help all mankind.

But Christ suffered and died and arose again hundreds of years ago; how can we be "in" Christ, thus charged with His

life, immersed in the current of His actions? We can do so because Christ gave His Apostles the power to renew and to extend His redeeming Acts in various ways, and to hand on this power to other men. Thus He is with His Church, living and active, until the end of time.

Now, in the liturgical rites of the Church Christ's redeeming Acts are thus renewed and prolonged, and re-enacted here and now. We first share in the redemption by Baptism. As one of the great Fathers of the Church, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, explains, "What a wonder and a paradox! We did not actually die, we were not really buried, we did not, in actual fact, after having been crucified, rise again from the dead. But (at Baptism) the imitation (of these acts) is effected in an image, and salvation in reality. Christ was really crucified, really placed in the tomb, He really rose again. All these things were done for love of us, so that, sharing by imitation in His sufferings, we might truly obtain salvation. O overflowing love for men! Christ allowed His pure hands and feet to be pierced with nails and He suffered His Passion: by communion in His sufferings, He has given me the grace of salvation without my having suffered or struggled."

Thus Baptism adapts us, so to say, in the very roots of our being, to the pattern of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection. It gives us the powers to carry out this pattern in our whole lives and all our actions. For while we first receive the grace of salvation without physical suffering or struggle, as St. Cyril says—and most of us without the moral and psychological suffering and struggle which many adult converts to the faith endure—we certainly have to strive all our lives to cooperate with the graces we receive, and to be entirely refashioned according to the through-death-to-higher-life pattern of the Redemption. Baptism is not a kind of postage stamp on our souls entitling us passively to be sent up to heaven when we die. It is a dynamic pattern of life and action imprinted in the very roots of our being. We are to work out the implications of our Baptism by our own efforts, by learning about God's plan as He teaches it to us



through the Church, by opening our minds and wills to the vital flow of Christ's grace given to us in the Sacraments, and by trying, through loving obedience to God and loving service of one another for Christ's sake, to take part in carrying out that plan.

For every great need of our lives, there is some corresponding sacramental prolongation of His redeeming action to give us the strength and the power that we need to do His work in ourselves and in the world. For our growing up in Christ, there is Confirmation. For remaking and for increasing the connection between us and Christ's life, there is the Sacrament of Penance. For marking with the life-giving pattern of Christ's work the ordinary Christian vocation of marriage, there is the Sacrament of Matrimony. For bringing our great illnesses more fully into the saving current of Christ's sufferings, there is the Anointing of the Sick, Extreme Unction.

At the very heart of our Christian life is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the re-enactment of the work of our Redemption. This is made present here and now by the power handed on to our priests at their ordination, the power to act in the person of Christ in offering His own sacrifice. In the Mass, day by day and week by week, we offer ourselves with Christ to the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, in thanksgiving for all that God is and does for us; we offer ourselves with Christ to share in His suffering and death in accordance with God's plan for the redemption of mankind. And in the Mass we receive Christ's Body to be the nourishment of His life in us, to unite us with Him and with one another, and to be the pledge of our future sharing together, body and soul, and in the happiness of His risen life.

In the same way, the cycle of the liturgical year brings each year of our lives more completely into the current of the Redemption. During Lent we prepare by fasting, almsgiving and prayer to take part in the solemn rites of Holy Week in which, together with the whole Church, we follow Christ through His passion and death to the glory of His Resurrection.

## What Is "Active Participation"?

God means us to take part in the great work of Christ, the salvation of mankind, according to the nature He has given us. We are, then, to take part intelligently and freely. For this we need continually to grow in understanding of this work and in appreciation of God's love. This understanding and appreciation is not something we can learn by rote once and for all when we are children. God calls us to be His friends, to be members of His family, and to enter into His plans more and more fully all our lives long. And He tells us about Himself and His designs for human happiness most particularly in Holy Scripture, His Word, as it is given to us by the Church in the Liturgy. We are, then, meant to *hear* God's Word when we attend the rites of the Church.

The rites themselves, the movements, words, gestures, and the use of material things are meant, first, to tell us what the rites are accomplishing and, second, to enable us to express our part in them. For example, the marking of the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone being baptized is meant to express to everyone present the fact that Baptism invisibly imprints the vital pattern of the Cross in the very substance of the candidate's being. So we are meant to *enter into the significance of the rites*.

In his Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy, the Holy Father defines it as "the public worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder and, through Him, to the heavenly Father." Obviously, then, the community is to take part in this worship, and the community includes the laity as well as the clergy. Since the Sacraments charge us with Christ's own life and activity, it would be odd indeed if we were to be merely the "dumb and idle spectators" described by Pope Pius XII. The great Work of Christ is being re-enacted so that we may share in it, and receive its fruit.

Since we are human beings, God made us compounds of soul and body. If we simply watch in silence what the priest and his assistants are doing up at the altar, it is very difficult

for most of us to take our active part mentally and spiritually in the sacred Action. And again, if we cannot express our spiritual activity outwardly, when we are gathered together in church, it is difficult indeed to realize that we form a *community*, and that we are engaged in a *community activity* with our priests—the great Action of God's People, the Mass.

So many of the rites of the Church provide for our *singing and speaking together* to stimulate and to express our response to God's Word, our unity of mind and heart with the Celebrant, our part in the Sacrifice. And the rites provide for our *doing things together*—standing, kneeling, walking in procession, and, above all, for our eating together at the Table of the Holy Eucharist.

Active participation thus includes: 1) *intelligent and willing hearing of God's Word*, 2) *entering into the meaning and action of the Sacred Rites*, 3) *singing and saying the parts provided for the people and carrying out the actions*. And this is the active participation for which the revised Holy Week Rites make special provision, and which the recent Popes and the authorities of the Church are so eager to have us take.

### **How Can the Liturgy be Restored?**

One further question occurs at once. Since it is so important for the faithful to take this "active part in the Sacred Mysteries," since this is indeed the "primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit," as St. Pius X and his successors have stated—how is it that we have not been taking this part in recent centuries? How is it that it is now being restored to us step by step?

The answer lies in the fact that the liturgy has two aspects—the divine unchangeable aspect which is Christ's Work, and the human and changeable aspect which is the work of men of various times and places, various cultures and ways of thought. Our Lord Himself first gave His redeeming Acts to be renewed through His Church in the framework of already-existing Jewish ritual acts of His own time. And the

Church through the ages has expanded and elaborated these ritual acts according to the needs and ways of thought of all the various civilizations and cultures in which she has carried out His Work.

Ideally, the human changeable aspect of each Rite—the embodiment of it—should express to the people participating in it just what it *is*. And it should also be the means by which the people taking part can easily express their response to Christ's Action. During the early ages of the Church, the Liturgy was thus self-explanatory. But as the centuries went by, each age made its own additions to the prayers, ceremonies, customs and interpretations of the various Rites. And as a result of many complex historical influences, the majority of the faithful understood less and less the meaning of the rites, and took less and less of an active part beyond the bare essentials of physical presence and general mental attention to God's presence and action.

Beginning with the pontificate of St. Pius X, the Holy Spirit has worked through the Church slowly and prudently to reverse this trend, and to enable the faithful once more to take that fully active part in the Sacred Rites which is the source of fully Christian life and activity. Let us be grateful, then, that we live in such times; and let us do everything in our power to respond to the invitation of the teaching Church, and to take our part again as the *laity*, that is, not as strangers or outsiders in the Church, but as the *People of God*.

### **How the Restoration Encourages Participation.**

The restoration is concerned, first of all, with the very practical question of when to hold the ceremonies. As the yearly renewal of the great mysteries of our redemption, the ceremonies were held originally on the same day of the week and at the same times as those on which Our Lord accomplished these Mysteries. So the Mass commemorating the institution of the Holy Eucharist was held at the time of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday evening. The solemn rites



commemorating the Passion and Death of Christ were held on Good Friday afternoon. Holy Saturday, the day when Our Lord's body lay in the tomb while His soul was in the world of the dead, was a day of silence and preparation. During the night before Easter Sunday, the night during which Christ arose from the dead, was held the great Easter Vigil culminating at dawn in the Easter Mass.

These times for holding the solemn ceremonies of Holy Week suited the way of life of the Christians of the first centuries. But in the Middle Ages conditions changed. For one thing, conditions were at that time so unsettled that it was dangerous for ordinary people to be out after dark. Evening and night ceremonies were thus gradually pushed back to become morning ceremonies. The Holy Thursday Mass was held in the morning; so were the Good Friday rites; and the Easter Vigil was anticipated by nearly twenty hours, being held early on Holy Saturday morning, and thus doing away entirely with the proper celebration of Holy Saturday as a day of silence and mourning, and turning it into a kind of semi-Easter. This also rendered many of the ceremonies of the Easter Vigil very incongruous.

But now conditions have changed again. What was convenient for people in the Middle Ages is no longer convenient for us. The great days of Holy Week are no longer holidays, so that people are not generally free to attend services in the morning. Work schedules and the general way of life makes it easier for most of us to add extra events to our weekday routine, not in the morning (even the very early morning) but in the late afternoon or evening. During the last decades, therefore, the congregations at the solemn Holy Week services, particularly at the most crucial of all, the Easter Vigil, have consisted of Sisters, children from Catholic schools and those few who could arrange their business so as to attend. Ordinary working men and women could not go at all, or found it extremely inconvenient to do so. The further difficulty of understanding or taking any real part in the ceremonies—particularly in the most important of all,

the Easter Vigil—did not offer any incentive to people to make a great effort to attend. They went instead to the extraliturgical services which were provided in the late afternoons and evenings.

But these extraliturgical services, as the Decree says, cannot make up for the loss of the special sacramental grace given by active participation in the liturgical Rites of Holy Week. Therefore, just as the Church is now making the Mass more and more available to her children in the evening, so she is now returning to the original afternoon and evening hours for the Holy Week services. And she is doing so for the same reason—that we may be able to attend them.

So the Mass of Holy Thursday commemorating the Last Supper is celebrated at the “most convenient hour”\* between 4.00 and 9.00 P.M. The bishop may give permission for one or two low Masses in addition to the principal Mass to be celebrated within the same hours, where pastoral reasons make it advisable to do so. Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful only during the principal Mass, during the other low Masses authorized by the bishop, or immediately afterwards. It may be brought to the sick either in the morning or the afternoon.

The solemn ceremonies of Good Friday commemorating the Passion and Death of Our Lord are normally to begin around 3:00 P.M. But if pastoral reasons make it advisable, the rite may begin as early as noon or at any other convenient time up to 9:00 P.M. *Everyone may receive* at the Communion service which is part of this rite.

The Easter Vigil is essentially a *night service*, and is to begin at the time (10:00 - 11:00 P.M.) which makes it possible for the Vigil Mass to start around midnight. When the bishop “judges that for grave reasons of public and pastoral order it is more suitable to advance the hour for celebration of the Easter Vigil,”\* he may give special permission to do so, but it may not begin before sunset. At this Vigil Mass,

\* *Dispositions and Regulations concerning the Holy Week Liturgy*, (N.C.W.C. Press)



which is the first Mass of Easter, all again are urged to receive Holy Communion. And when this Mass is celebrated at the ideal time, that is, beginning around midnight, to take part in it satisfies the obligation of Easter Sunday Mass attendance.

With the new Eucharistic fast regulations, in force since March 25, 1957, planning to fast so as to go to Communion during these Holy Week services is certainly not difficult for an individual, and needs only a little more thought and care for a family. *To fast from solid food and alcoholic beverages for three hours before the time of receiving Communion, and from non-alcoholic beverages other than water for one hour*, is no strain on anyone's endurance. Plain water never breaks the fast, and so the thirsty can refresh themselves up to the time of entering the church. Those who have not been fasting during Lent and are prone to "nibbling" between meals need to take a little extra care; mothers may need to rearrange mealtime somewhat and to remind the children about not eating during the fasting period. But this is surely a very small effort to make by way of preparation for Communion, especially during Holy Week.

Besides the changes in the time of the great ceremonies of Holy Week, the rites have been "renewed" in various other ways in order to *bring out more clearly the meaning of each and to give the congregation more of an active part*. These aspects of the renewal are best appreciated in connection with the whole service of each day. But first let us see how the Church wishes us to prepare during Lent for taking part in these great services of Holy Week.

## II. OUR LENTEN PREPARATION

### Dying in Order to Live

Lent is the time when we train ourselves, under the guidance of the Church, to take part in the yearly renewal of the mysteries of our redemption in Holy Week. We do so just as athletes train themselves for a contest. In Holy Week we

are to be renewed and strengthened in our Baptismal grace of dying to sin and selfishness and of being charged with the life of grace, the life of Christ. During Lent, therefore, we are to practice *dying to sin and selfishness*; we are to practice *living in loving service of one another in Christ*. That is why the Church commands us to *fast and abstain*. This has the clear purpose of training us in self-control, of giving us practice in giving up some nonessential food at God's command. In doing so we strengthen the habit of giving up things in obedience to God, and this humble obedience makes us stronger in resisting temptation. The fasting and abstinence regulations for Lent are concerned with food in particular because eating is the obvious and essential support of our physical life, and a kind of continuation of our creation. In giving up food for the sake of God, therefore, we show our sorrow for having disobeyed God our creator. We rehearse in a small and easy way our willingness to give up anything for God, even our very lives. So we do *penance*, we try to make up for our past disobedience to God, we try to "die" to the kind of life which involved us in disobedience to Him.

The Church asks us also, as part of our Lenten penance, to *give to the needy* what we save by our fasting and abstinence. For thus we try to make up for—do penance for—our past selfishness, and we practice the loving service of our neighbors for the sake of Christ which is true Christian living.

Those of us who cannot fast during Lent should, therefore, find *something to do without*—preferably in the way of food or drink. And those of us who, even by doing without, have no *money* to give to others, should try to find some neighbor's *need to serve*—a spiritual or mental need if not a physical one.

### Entering Into God's Plans

The other aspect of our Lenten preparation consists in this: *listening to God's Word as He tells us about His great plan for the salvation and happiness of mankind in Christ*,

and responding to His invitation to take part in carrying it out. Christ's Passion and Death and Resurrection are the very heart and force and structure of this Design. The more fully we understand and appreciate God's over-all plan, the more we long to respond to His loving mercy by doing whatever He asks of us, and the better prepared we are to take part in the rites of Holy Week and to be renewed by them.

We do this, of course, in a general way by all prayer: by spiritual reading, Lenten devotions, the Stations, the Rosary. But we enter into and respond to God's Plan most especially at Mass. And the Masses of Lent might be called our yearly refresher course" in which we relearn what God has done for us, what He asks of us, what He promises us.

God's Word in Holy Scripture is given to us by the Church in the Liturgy; and here we are taught not by abstract definitions but by vivid descriptions—histories, stories, pictures, images. As St. Thomas says, we men can make up and compose words to describe realities, but God can make real things and events describe the spiritual realities of our salvation in Christ. So, in the vast design of His merciful love, He carried out His great works for the Jewish people in the Old Testament in such a way that they describe for us the realities of our life in Christ now and hereafter. For example, His great deliverance of the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt to become His own people, living under His commands and protection, is a description of our deliverance by Baptism from slavery to the powers of evil to begin our new life as members of God's people. His feeding of the Jews in the desert with manna from heaven shows us that He feeds us here and now with the true Bread from heaven, the Holy Eucharist, as we travel through the desert of this life to the Promised Land of heaven.

In the same way, Our Lord worked His miracles not solely to prove the truth of His words and to do good to the people He then helped. He did them also to teach us about the invisible miracles which He is performing every day for

(Continued on page 18)

**Second Sunday in Passion-Time (Palm Sunday)**  
**the day of Christ the King**

Masses as usual. Procession carrying blessed palms in honor of Christ the King takes place before the principal Mass. With the Bishop's permission, this blessing, procession and Mass may be held in the evening for the sake of greater attendance.

**Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday**

Masses as usual. Confession should be made on one of these three days in preparation for receiving Communion on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and at the Easter Vigil Mass.

**Holy Thursday**  
**the day of the Holy Eucharist**

**MORNING:** In the Cathedral the Bishop celebrates a special Mass to consecrate the Holy Oils.

**NOON:** Lenten lunch or dinner as usual.

**AFTERNOON:** For the reception of Holy Communion, begin fasting from solid food *three hours* before the actual time of Communion. Fasting from non-alcoholic liquids other than water begins *one hour* before Communion time. Example: for those attending Mass beginning at 5:00 P.M., begin the Eucharistic fast at 2:30 P.M. For those attending a Mass beginning at 8:00 P.M., begin the fast at 5:30 P.M.

Mass may begin between 4:00 and 9:00 P.M. See your parish bulletin for the exact schedule in your parish. In families with small children, one or the other parent might be able to take advantage of the different schedule of a neighboring parish on these three days, so that both parents may attend.

**EVENING:** Solemn Mass of the Last Supper with general Communion. With the Bishop's permission one or two additional low Masses may be offered if necessary, so that all the faithful may attend and receive Communion. Communion is distributed only during Mass, or immediately afterwards. Transfer of the Blessed Sacrament to the Repository.

**AFTER MASS:** Visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the Repository.

**Good Friday**  
**the day of the Lord's Passion and Death**

Complete abstinence and fast today.

**MORNING:** Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, when time allows. The Solemn Services may begin at any time from noon to 9:00 P.M. Consult your parish bulletin, and plan mealtimes accordingly, be-



## TIME TABLE

gin fasting from solid food *three hours* before the time of receiving Communion:

NOON OR WHATEVER OTHER HOUR APPOINTED IN YOUR PARISH. Solemn Good Friday Services: Readings about the Passion; Prayers that its effects may flow out into the whole world; Veneration of the Cross; Communion service at which all the faithful are urged to receive.

AFTER THE SERVICES. Since it is the Solemn Services of the Church that "have a particular sacramental power and efficacy for the nourishment of Christian life (see page 3), we should strive to take part in them with the fullest possible attention and devotion. It therefore seems unadvisable for most people to try to attend any lengthy extraliturgical service *beforehand*, even the otherwise praiseworthy "Three Hours." *After* we have taken as full a part in the Church's Solemn Service as possible is the time for any other devotions for which we have the time and strength—for example, the Way of the Cross in the evening, when we have taken part in the Services in the afternoon.

### Holy Saturday

the day of the Lord's sojourn among the dead

The Lenten fast and complete abstinence lasts until midnight, unless the bishop gives a special dispensation.

MORNING: Preparatory ceremonies of Baptism for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil services. Household preparations for Easter.

NOON: Lenten lunch or dinner as usual.

AFTERNOON: Last opportunity for Confession. Lenten supper or dinner as usual to be finished, however, three hours before Communion time. The ceremonies begin about an hour before Communion time.

### The Great Easter Vigil

The services normally begin about 10:30 P.M. so that the Mass will start about midnight. Mass beginning about midnight satisfies the Sunday obligation of Mass attendance. If the services are, by special permission, held earlier in the evening, they are not to begin before sunset.

Blessing of the New Fire. Blessing of the Paschal Candle and Procession. Easter Praise of Christ, the Redeemer. Prophecies of the Redemption. Blessing of the Baptismal Water, Baptisms, and solemn renewal of Baptismal Vows.

### The First Mass of Easter

Alleluia!

us in the Sacraments. His healing of the man born blind reminds us that in Baptism He opens the eyes of our spirits to be able to see Him, the true Light. His healing of the lepers shows that in Baptism He cleanses us of the disease of what Scripture calls our "oldness," the old life of sin which is our inheritance from Adam. His raising of the dead tells us that by Baptism and Penance He raises us from the spiritual death of sin to the life of God's children. So He will raise us also from the physical death, which sin causes, to share the vitality and joy of His Own risen life.

During Lent, then, let us listen to this instruction which God gives us in Holy Scripture and, in particular, to Holy Scripture as the Church gives it to us during Mass. For here we are given Christ's Word directly from the mouth of His "other self," His priest, speaking in His name. Even when we cannot go to Mass, it is good to take ten minutes or so to read the Proper of the Mass for the day.

In general, the Lesson of the Mass tells us something about our life in Christ; this is done either in the figures of the Old Testament, or in the words of one of the New Testament Epistles. The Gospel gives us Christ Himself speaking to us or acting for us. The chants of the Mass (Introit, Gradual and Tract, Offertory and Communion) show us what our thoughts and feelings should be as we respond to God's invitation. Then, especially in the Masses of Passion Week and Holy Week, we learn what Christ's own thoughts and feelings were before and during His Passion as they are expressed in the words of the Psalms foretelling His suffering. The Collect, Secret and Postcommunion Prayers of each Mass express our desire to respond to God's word, to take our part in His Plan, and our prayer to be given, through Christ, the grace to do so.

Let us, then, do penance during Lent by fasting and almsgiving, and let us pray especially by taking part in the Mass. In this way we will prepare ourselves for the yearly renewal of our Christian life through the mysteries of Holy Week.



### III. THE GREAT DAYS OF HOLY WEEK

#### 1. The Second Sunday in Passion Time (Palm Sunday)

##### *The Solemn Procession in honor of Christ the King*

The special ceremony of the first day of Holy Week is a special procession in honor of Christ our King. On this day Our Lord made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowds recognized and hailed Him as the King whom God has promised them, the Son of David, who would rule over them in a kingdom of everlasting peace and prosperity and happiness. So they shouted with joy and waved branches from the trees by the wayside. They laid down their garments in the road to form a royal path for Him. And they sang the Psalm which had been written for the King-to-come, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!"

In this Sunday's procession we renew their action. Christ is present in our midst this day in the person of His priest. We accompany Him in procession carrying blessed palms; we hail Him as our King Whose victory over His enemies is won, not by human warfare but by His Passion, Death and Resurrection; we hail Him as our King Whose kingdom is extended here on earth not by human warfare, but by love and suffering and work for others undertaken in His power and in His name. By taking part in the procession we show our faith in Christ. He is on His way to suffer and die for us; we believe that through suffering and death we are to follow Him to victory. And we show our loyalty to Him. His kingdom is still invisible; its glory will not appear until He returns at the end of time. But now we renew our determination to take whatever part He has assigned us in the establishment of His rule; we resolve to work with all our lives and strength for that kingdom of "truth and life, of justice, love and peace" which He comes to bring to mankind.

## The Mass

This is *the* Mass of the Passion, and in it we find the great themes of Holy Week set out. We are given the main line, so to speak, of God's Plan in the Epistle. Christ became for our sakes obedient to death, even to death on the Cross. And it is for this reason that God has exalted Him, setting His human nature in glory at His right hand. During Holy Week we are to learn the lessons of His Passion and to begin again to carry them out in our lives. In this way we hope that He may give us a share in the glory of His Resurrection.

The second theme describes the Redemption as a great struggle to free mankind from the dominion of the powers of evil. These powers are described, particularly in verses from the Psalms, as wild beasts and as human enemies who are cruel and relentless, eager to attack, betray, and bring to ruin both Christ and ourselves. The devil conquered Adam by means of the Tree in the garden of paradise; now Christ conquers him by means of the Tree of the Cross (Preface).

And the third theme is that of Our Lord's sufferings. Throughout them He looks forward with perfect trust in His Father's care, to the wonderful effects which they will produce—His Resurrection and glory, the birth of a new nation of the redeemed who will praise God forever for His mercy and kindness.

The Gospel is that of the Passion in the account of St. Matthew. In the restored rites it has been shortened to include only the Passion itself.

### 2. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

The Masses repeat and develop these same themes, as they prepare us for Holy Thursday and the three great days of Christ suffering, dying, and rising again. NOW IS THE TIME TO GO TO CONFESSION as the climax of Lenten *penance* so that the power of Christ's sufferings may complete what our efforts have striven for, and make us ready to take part in the great rites of Holy Week, the renewal of the grace of our Baptism.

### 3. Holy Thursday

Above every other day in the year, this is the Day of the Holy Eucharist. Today, at the Last Supper, Our Lord offered His suffering and death to the Father as His sacrifice of love and thanksgiving; He gave it to His Church to be her sacrifice and so ours, "showing forth the death of the Lord until He comes"; He gave the fruit of the sacrifice, His body, to be the Food which should nourish His life in us and unite us to Him and to one another in the one life of His Mystical Body.

In the evening beginning at any hour from 4:00 to 9:00 P.M., as convenient, the solemn evening Mass of the Last Supper, the Mass commemorating the institution of the Holy Eucharist is offered. Here we all gather round our pastor, Christ's immediate representative to us, to celebrate the great Gift of His love.

During the Last Supper, Our Lord told His Apostles very clearly what He wishes in return for His sacrifice and His gift. He wishes us to love one another as He has loved us—even to laying down our lives for one another for His sake. The Epistle of the Mass tells us in St. Paul's words that a lack of consideration for one another's needs makes us unfit to partake of the Lord's Supper. The Gospel portrays Our Lord washing His disciples' feet, and teaching them to do for one another what He, the Master, has done for them. In the civilization in which Our Lord lived, people wore sandals or went barefoot, and did their traveling mainly on foot on dusty unpaved roads. To enable guests to wash their feet was a universal act of hospitality, but one that was actually carried out by servants, not by the Master of the house, still less by an honored "rabbi" or teacher. Our Lord gave His Apostles a really startling example, therefore, at the Last Supper; and He showed us also that it is thoughtful *personal* service of one another's needs for His sake which He asks of us as the proof of our love of Him. In today's world, where there is such great need of truly Christian service of one another for love, the restored rites of Holy

Week allow for the re-enactment of Christ's example in the meaningful ceremony of the Mandatum, or Washing, that takes place after the Gospel of the Mass if the pastor finds it feasible.

When we receive Holy Communion, Christ refashions our human affections with the strength of His own love. In our Holy Thursday Communion, then, let us open our hearts to His love, and ask Him how we may best live in that love and be the means of extending it to others.

After the Solemn Mass, the Hosts consecrated for the Good Friday Communion service are transferred in procession to a side altar or Repository. When the Bishop has given permission, low Masses may follow the main Mass or precede it between the hours of 4:00 and 9:00 P.M. so that all the faithful may be able to attend and receive Holy Communion. Communion may also be distributed immediately after Mass but at no other time on this day (except, of course, to the sick and dying). The priests are asked to consecrate *at this Mass* all the Hosts to be received today and at tomorrow's Communion service, so that on this Day of the Holy Eucharist we may partake of the fruit of the Sacrifice we have joined together in offering through the hands of our priest.

After the Mass, all the altars, except that of the Repository, are stripped of their coverings while the priests recite Psalm 21, the great Psalm of the Passion. Our Lord has offered Himself to suffer and die for our salvation; now His offering is to be carried out. He is to be stripped of His garments as are the altars; He is to suffer degradation so that we may strip off the garments of our sinfulness, and be re clothed with His robes of grace and glory.

From the end of Mass on Holy Thursday evening until midnight, at least, all who can should make the customary visit to the Repository to thank Our Lord for all that He did and suffered for us in His Passion. A good practice is that of bringing a copy of the New Testament to church and reading during our visits St. John's account of the Last Supper and of Our Lord's words and prayer.



#### 4. Good Friday

On this day of Our Lord's suffering and death on the Cross the Church has never celebrated Mass, the sacramental re-enactment of His death. Instead, she invites us to take part with her in the Solemn Liturgical Afternoon Service of the Passion and Death of the Lord.

The first of these ceremonies is *the Readings*. We hear God's Word telling us about the Passion and Death of Christ, first in two prophetic passages from the Old Testament, and then in the Gospel of St. John. And we respond to God's message by chants and prayers. The purpose of this ceremony is easy to see—God Himself, by His Word, is forming our minds and imaginations and hearts to the image of His Son dying on the Cross. The Church trains us by her chants and prayers to give the right response to God's Word of love and mercy—the response of sorrow for sin, of gratitude, of love and desire to do God's Will.

The second ceremony is the *Solemn Prayers* that the effects of Christ's Passion may flow out to the whole world. The third ceremony is the *Adoration of the Cross*. After the solemn unveiling, the cross is held erect by two acolytes standing by the altar rail. The people file past genuflecting and then kissing the feet of the Crucified. While we are doing so, the "Reproaches" are sung. Here Christ Himself tells us what He has done for us, His People, and asks why we are crucifying Him in return. He describes what He does for us in the Sacraments in terms of the great deeds which He did for the Jews in the Old Testament. As He delivered them from slavery in Egypt, dividing the Red Sea, accompanying them in the pillar of cloud, so by Baptism He has freed us from the slavery of sin, brought us through the waters of Baptism to new life, and accompanies us with His presence. As He fed them with manna in the desert, so He feeds us with His own Body in Holy Communion. And He reproaches us with our sins in terms of His own sufferings. But we cannot comfort ourselves with the obvious fact that we did not betray Him, open His side with a lance, scourge Him, strike Him,

crucify Him. For whatever we have done wrong or neglected to do right, we have scourged and crucified Him. . . . "Whatever you do to my least brethren, you do to Me." Meanness, idle gossip, lack of self-restraint, lack of kindness, —all these daily faults, as well as our serious misdeeds, sin against Christ's love, the love He shows for us in Baptism and Holy Communion, the love which made Him die for us.

And the fourth ceremony on Good Friday is the *Communion service*. General Communion of the faithful on this day was the custom in earlier ages of the Church, and is now restored once more. The Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession from the Repository. Then, led by the priest, we, all together, pray the Our Father in Latin. We have been hearing it in Latin all during our lives; even if we have never had the occasion before to say it in Latin, to join in it *aloud* will be no great strain on anyone's ability.

We are asked to join in praying the Lord's Prayer *aloud* because this is the oldest and most perfect prayer of preparation for Communion. Not only do we ask the Father for our daily Bread, but we express the spirit of *forgiveness* of one another's faults and failings and sins. This is the spirit in which we should receive the Sacrament which is to unite us to one another in Christ. Most especially on this day of His death, when Our Lord gave us the example of asking His Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him, should we ask for His spirit of forgiveness and forbearance before we receive Him in Holy Communion.

After the Our Father, the Celebrant says the prayer which follows in the Mass, "Deliver us, O Lord, from all evils . . ." Then he says the third of the three Communion prayers in the Mass, "May the receiving of Thy Body . . ." and the "Lord, I am not worthy." He himself communicates and then Communion is distributed to the faithful. During the distribution Psalm 21 may be sung.

This restored Good Friday Communion gives us a special opportunity to unite ourselves sacramentally to Our Lord in the mystery of His Death. As the Holy Father tells us in his



Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy, it is our privilege as baptized members of Christ not only to join in offering, but to *be offered* in His Sacrifice. Let us ask Our Lord on Good Friday to remake us, to give us the grace to die more and more fully to our sinfulness and selfishness by the power of His life-giving death. Thus we will be more and more fit to be included in His perfect Offering. In terms of daily living, this means that we are to find our true life less and less in doing what leads merely to our own pleasure, success, and self-esteem; and more and more in what leads to the carrying out of God's plan—to the loving service of one another for Christ.

## 5. Holy Saturday

This is the day of Our Lord's sojourn among the dead, the day of His deepest descent into the miseries of mankind. God gave our first parents the preternatural gift of immortality, which was lost by the Fall. Physical death is thus the greatest effect and punishment of the spiritual death which is sin. Death is the negation, the deprivation of life; when men died after the Fall, their bodies lay lifeless in the grave and their souls went to the state of dim half life described obscurely by both Jewish and pagan tradition. When Christ our Lord suffered for us, He endured this state also, as His last and lowest descent into the depths of our misery. He, the Son of God, Life itself, allowed His human body to lie lifeless in the tomb, while His human soul went down, as the Creed says, "to the world below," the world of the dead. And by so doing, He conquered death, as well as sin of which death is the effect. In the old phrase, He "harrowed hell" (not, of course the hell of the damned, but what we now call Limbo), and, by the power of His resurrection, raised to the life of heaven all those souls of the just who had died since the beginning of the world. And, when He comes again in His glory at the end of the world, He will raise the bodies of His faithful also to share His glorious and immortal life.

It is said that Saturday is Our Lady's special day because on the first Holy Saturday she alone kept faith and hope in her Son's victory. Let us, then, spend this Holy Saturday with her as we go about our work and our special preparations for Easter. Let us spend this day in as much silence as possible, mourning the death of Christ and the sins that caused it, and looking forward to His triumph and our triumph with Him.

## 6. The Easter Vigil

This is the night of Christ's great journey, His great Passing-over from the depths of death to the heights of divine life. Christ rises from among the dead to the glory of His risen life at the right hand of the Father, and He brings us with Him. During Lent we have tried to cooperate with God's work in us so as to be ready to renew and deepen our Baptismal grace of dying to sin and selfishness by the power of Christ's death. Now He will raise us up with Himself and, in proportion to the generosity of our efforts, He will fill us with greater fullness of His life and Easter joy.

This great journey with Christ from death to life is presented in the Easter Vigil first as coming out of darkness into the Light. Our Lord spoke of Himself as the Light of the world. The prophets foretold Him as the Sun of Justice, the brightness of God's own Light. St. John tells us that in heaven we shall need no light but Him. The Easter Vigil begins, then, by the blessing of *new fire*, not kindled from another fire but fresh struck from a flint. For Our Lord, risen from the dead, is the beginning of God's new creation, which will be far more wonderful than the old. The "oldness" of sin and death is to be done away with; all is now to be newness of life and joy.

Then the Paschal candle is marked with Christ's Cross, blessed and lighted from the new fire. This Candle is the special Easter symbol of Christ and sign of His presence among us in the glory of His risen life. So it is now carried through the dark church in procession, while the deacon sings

three times *Lumen Christi!* "the light of Christ" and we all kneel and answer *Deo gratias* "thanks be to God." During this procession, we see how the Light of Christ is to spread throughout the whole world. First, the candle held by the Celebrant is lighted from the Paschal candle, then those of all the clergy, then ours—all from the flame of Christ, gradually lighting up the dark church building. So we are to be enkindled with His own light and to help spread it to all mankind.

After this procession, in which all are to take part, we return to our places. Then the deacon sings the *Exsultet*, Easter praise of Christ's Redemption and the Father's mercy and love. The *Exsultet* ends with the prayer that God may guide us and govern us and keep us as we celebrate with joy the feast of Eastertide.

Then we sit and listen to four Readings telling us about our life as God's people. The first shows us that this life is a *new creation*; the second that it is a *deliverance from slavery to freedom*, a victory over the powers of evil; the third shows us that it is a foretaste of heaven, a life of holiness under God's protection; and the fourth that, here on earth, it is a life of effort to keep faithful to God's commandments. After each of these Readings we respond to God's message by chants and prayer.

Now we are ready for the third part of the Easter Vigil, presenting the Redemption to us as a *new birth* by water and the Holy Spirit to the life of children of God. But first we join in singing the Litany of the Saints. We ask all those who are living in the happiness of heaven the life first given them in Baptism to help us renew and strengthen the grace of our Baptism so that we may one day enjoy their companionship.

After the Litany of the Saints, comes the Blessing of the Baptismal water. We hear all the wonderful deeds which God did by means of water in both the Old Testament and the New, the wonderful things which He does for us in

Baptism. Our Lord Himself at His Baptism in the Jordan first sanctified the water of the whole world so that it might be used for Baptism. So now the sign of His presence, the Paschal candle, is lowered three times into this water to sanctify it and fill it with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Oils are poured into it: first, the "Oil of catechumens" which strengthens the candidates for Baptism before the struggle with the powers of evil from which they emerge victorious with Christ's strength; and then Holy Chrism by which we are anointed as sharers in Christ's anointing by the Holy Spirit and in His dignity as Priest and King.

Now comes the climax of the Vigil, the administration of Baptism and the renewal of our Baptismal vows. Here new converts rise from death to share Christ's life; and we renew the grace of our Baptism by the power of Christ's rising from the dead. Then, all together, we say the prayer of Christ's people, the Our Father, and we are sprinkled with blessed water as the sacramental sign of the renewal of our baptismal grace.

Now all is newness as we prepare to take part in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. While we sing the second half of the Litany of the Saints, the celebrant and his ministers go to change into white vestments. The penitential coverings are taken from the holy images, candles, and flowers are brought to the altar. All is ready for the most joyful Mass of the year, the first Mass of Easter.

At the *Gloria* (which, whenever possible, all should join in singing) the bells so long silent are rung again. Then the Collect prayers ask for the special Easter grace of serving God in *newness* of life and joy. After listening to the Epistle, which describes what our true life is now to be, we take part in the solemn singing of the Easter Alleluia, the great shout meaning "Praise to God." The celebrant sings the Alleluia three times; each time we are to sing it after him as the expression of our Easter praise and thanks. In the Mass we offer ourselves with Christ's offering in thanksgiving for all God's goodness. In return we receive Christ's Easter



gift, Holy Communion, the pledge and foretaste of our share in His risen life and joy.

The Mass closes with the prayer of *Lauds*, the Church's dawn prayer praising the light of Christ as He rises from the grave. Easter time is now before us in which to celebrate with gladness the new life that we have received.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

## IV. AIDS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The following suggestions are not intended as aids for the first reading or discussion but rather as aids toward finding in each section fuller meaning than may be at first apparent. A copy of the New Testament and of the New Holy Week Missal will be needed.

### Chapter I, Parts 1 and 2

#### **Making the renewal effective.**

Have we tried to take part in the procession of the Palms in our parish in former years? How could we help to make it a fuller act of homage to Christ the King *this year*, for ourselves, our children?

How could we help to make Holy Thursday a real feast of Christian charity in our homes?

What can we do to make the Solemn Services on Good Friday the central act of this day? To make the whole day a participation in Christ's sufferings and death?

Do we realize the great importance for our whole Christian life of taking part in the Easter Vigil?

#### **Why attend the liturgical rites?**

Do we think of Christ chiefly or even exclusively as Teacher, Lawgiver, and Model? Do we think of Him as our Priest, our Mediator with God? See St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, 4:14-5:1, 5:7-10; 9:6-14; 10:19-25.

Do we think of the Christian life as a matter only of believing certain truths and obeying certain laws, or do we

think of it as a life lived in Christ, and as a participation in His worship of the Father? See the epistle to the Romans, 6:1-11, in relation to the quotation from St. Cyril of Jerusalem on Baptism. See Colossians, 3:1-11 and Philippians 2:1-11.

## **Chapter I, Parts 3, 4 and 5.**

### **What is "active participation"?**

The one thing necessary for active participation by the laity in the Mass is summed up by Pope Pius XII in the words of St. Paul: "Have this mind in you which also was in Christ Jesus." Consider the relationships between this internal participation and external participation by responding to the priest, singing, etc.

Reread Philippians, 2:5-11 in relation to this question.

### **How can the Liturgy be restored?**

Consider how the following practices have helped people to participate actively in the Liturgy: congregational chant at High Mass; Dialogue Mass; use of the Missal; use of the new American Ritual.

### **Present restoration encourages us to take part in the rites.**

Consider the Holy Week timetable and the chart of fasting regulations in relation to your particular circumstances.

## **Chapter II. Lenten Preparation.**

### **Dying in order to live.**

The Collects in the Masses during Lent express concisely the purposes of fasting. A listing of these purposes especially as seen in the Collects of the third and fourth weeks would be enlightening.

Consider the relation of fasting to almsgiving as taught in the Epistle, Gospel and Postcommunion on the Friday after Ash Wednesday.

### **Entering into God's plans.**

Consider the Masses for Wednesday and Friday in the



fourth week of Lent according to the principles given in this section.

What other Old Testament figures of the Redemption have impressed you in your following of the Missal during Lent?

### **Chapter III. The Great Days of Holy Week.**

#### **The Second Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)**

Read St. John's Gospel, 12:12-36, and consider what we must keep in mind in order to make our acclamations to Christ on this day more meaningful than those of the people of Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday.

Consider which title of Christ means most to us. King? Leader? Redeemer? Messias? Some other title?

Consider the need in our day of messianic zeal in Christians. The world is entering a new era. Who will lead it? Who will unite it? Can the Palm procession be made an expression of confidence in Christ and of determination to follow Him? How?

#### **Holy Thursday, the day of the Eucharist.**

Read the epistle in the Mass of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:20-32). In the early years of the Church the weekly celebration of Mass, with all receiving Holy Communion, was in the evening, after a community supper. The supper was meant to be a natural bond of unity and the Lord's Supper was the supernatural bond of unity. St. Paul tells the people of Corinth they are unworthy of eating the Lord's Supper because in the common meal those who have plenty to eat are ignoring the needs of the poor. Consider the various types of division and discrimination among men today and consider why they should be eliminated entirely among those who partake of the Lord's Supper.

How does the rite of the washing of feet bring out the same lesson?

#### **Good Friday, the day of our Lord's death.**

Read the second Lesson in the Missal for Good Friday (or

the fuller account in the book of Exodus, chapters 11 to 14). Consider the ways in which the liberation from Egypt was a figure of the Redemption. Consider the ways in which the Passover was a figure of Holy Week.

In "the Prayer of the Faithful" the celebrant announces the intention for which all are to pray, the deacon sings "Flectamus genua," that is "Let us kneel," and all kneel to offer their prayers individually. Then all stand at the invitation of the deacon and the celebrant sings the collective prayer, all answering "Amen." Several successive intentions are prayed for in this way. Consider the various intentions of the Church as they are given in the Missal.

How does each of the first three parts of the Good Friday service dispose our minds for the reception of Holy Communion?

### **Holy Saturday, our Lord among the dead.**

It is probably that the practice of dedicating Saturday to the Blessed Virgin Mary arose in memory of the fact that she alone kept faith and hope alive during the time from Christ's Death to His Resurrection. Later He was to call His Apostles slow of heart for not understanding the Scriptures and His own words. See Luke, 24:25-27, 44-49.

See also Luke 9:18-36; 18:31-34; John, 5:24-30; 12:23-36.

Consider the Blessed Mother's understanding of the prophecies of His Sacrifice, for example, those from Isaias, read as Lessons in the Mass on Wednesday in Holy Week.

Are you acquainted with any of the numerous descriptions in literature of "the harrowing of hell"?

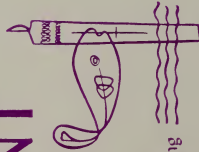
### **The Easter Vigil, the Night of the Resurrection.**

What are some of the specific evils in our day that constitute the darkness which Christ's Light alone can dispel?

Reread St. Paul to the Romans, 6:1-11, and the quotation from St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the first chapter. Consider these in relation to the rite for the renewal of Baptismal vows and the Epistle in the Mass of the Vigil.



# LENT



Its Purpose  
and Meaning

**LENT: Its Purpose and Meaning . . .** this booklet contains seven instructions, one for each week of Lent and based on that week's Lenten liturgy. Suggestions for study and discussion follow each instruction. Fasting and prayer as well as other Lenten mortifications are shown in true context. A booklet that is ideal for private study as well as group discussion and reading.



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